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July-August '08

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MICA (P) 061/12/2007

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THE SINGAPORE GARDEN FESTIVAL

The Singapore Garden Festival, the first garden show in the tropics to bring together and showcase creations from the world's top award-winning garden and floral designers under one roof, returns on 25 July to 1 August 2008.

The truly cosmopolitan Singapore Garden Festival in 2006 was a roaring success, having received accolades from overseas horticultural experts, rave reviews from more than 200,000 visitors from Singapore and around the world, and full support from the industry. This pre-eminent event has been established as a top international flower and garden show in the tropics, further enhancing Singapore's reputation as a garden city in the tropics.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SINGAPORE GARDEN FESTIVAL 2008 Landscape and Fantasy Gardens

Featuring creations by local designers and top award-winning garden designers from around the world including Australia, Germany, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, Sweden, South Africa, Thailand, United Kingdom and United States of America.

Floral Windows to the World

Featuring colourful and vibrant cut-flower displays and floral masterpieces with stunning set design and lighting by floral designers from Belgium, France, India, Norway, Macau and more.

Singapore Orchid Show

Showcasing Southeast Asia's rich and diverse heritage of orchids. A dazzling display of the most diverse botanical family and the most important plant group in the international floriculture industry.

Garden Fiesta

Offering educational, recreational and entertainment activities catering to the public, families, serious gardeners as well as hobbyists.

Vibrant MarketPlace

Offering a wide array of plants, gardening and landscape products and services, and arts & craft – all under one roof.

Level 2 (For trade visitors only)

Singapore Garden Festival Expo

This is the new highlight of the Festival. The three-day international trade exhibition and conference will feature internationally renowned horticulture and landscape experts who will come together to showcase and share industry best practices.

The Landscape and Fantasy garden designers are from all over the world. Many have won numerous awards. DIMITRI XENAKIS and MARO AVRABOU are leading site-specific artists and designers from France. Their recent competition wins include the 2007 International Gardens Festival at Chaumont, France and the Street Gardens Festival of Lyon, France. Dimitri is also a sculptor and photographer with a focus on natural and urban landscapes, while Maro specialises in light and colour in theatre, installations and gardens. They speak to Lien about their works.

"We usually brainstorm and share our ideas so as in the end we do not remember whose idea it was. Of course that means a lot of patience and mutual respect," says Dimitri Xenakis.

Dimitri Xenakis' father was an architect, and several persons in his family were painters. He grew up among people brainstorming, looking for new ideas, solutions to technical questions. As a site specific artist, sculptor and photographer, Dimitri tells us what he loves about his job.

"The aspect I enjoy most is to start a project. Each project is an opportunity for exploring and discovering new techniques and new ideas. Also, it's often a way to meet new people and foreign cultures. So the start is always an exciting time. Moreover, in my profession, you never get bored," he says.

Maro Avrabou left Greece, her native country, when she was 25, and went to Paris to study theatre.



Geneva, day



Geneva, night

"There I discovered the beauty of the theatrical lighting (in France they are actually excellent in it) and realized that what interested me the most was the visual part of a performance and not the acting or directing. So I started working as an assistant light designer and at the same time I took courses of theatre lighting. Later, with Dimitri, I started working on light installations and then gardens," Maro says.

Light is such an ethereal matter to those who don't comprehend its values. Maro's mastery of it may astound some people. How does she harness and create works of great beauty with light?

"I can't really explain that. I have always been interested in light, since I was a kid. Later on, I became conscious that light could change the aspect of things and make any ordinary object look different. Then I tried to learn how to work with it so that I could make the images that I had in my mind become reality."

Yet Maro says that the works are an evolving process. "Once the initial 'abstract' concept is there, then I have to proceed to tests and face concrete technical solutions. Sometimes I have to reconsider the whole thing because it is not feasible or out of budget, sometimes I find a new product that will lead the initial plan to a new direction. Then this first idea matures and takes its final appearance," says Maro.

Dimitri says that his work is deeply rooted in the natural and urban landscape, often viewed as opposing.

"These elements are supposed to be opposed but both are parts of the environment we have to live in. For me 'harmony' means combination, cohabitation of different elements that become complementary: combination of artificial and organic can be understood as cohabitation of nature and (human) culture. There is no harmony in combining similar elements," says Dimitri.

He adds that many factors will influence the final result.

THE SINGAPORE GARDEN FESTIVAL

"I would say that I always try to find the esthetical aspect of plants or materials and then combine them. It could be their color, their texture, their geometry. I'm combining them the same way a painter would combine colors on a canvas or a sculptor would combine materials on a sculpture."

Besides France, Dimitri and Maro have worked in many European cities. "European cultures are quite different one from other: different languages and customs. Even if they are all linked by same Greco/Roman/Christian culture, I have to adapt myself to each country I visit. Singapore looks like a Western city... with an Asian culture opened to all trends. I also have to adapt myself to this peculiar context...with pleasure," he says.

"Yet the main difficulties I would face would be my own habits. I mean not only the plants I would use but also the way I communicate my ideas. We are all influenced by our own cultures and the way we think as well as the plants we use are not universal. So the challenge would be to adapt myself to the local view and to be at the same time myself," he added, "But as I consider each project as a discovery, I would enjoy creating a garden on Singaporean grounds."

Maro feels that working in different cities does not pose a lot of differences. "It is not very different in the sense that, when you work out of your country, you have to adapt yourself to the local mentality and habits. This applies to Europe as well as to Asia or America," she says.

"The biggest difficulty will be to know which plants can survive and do well under a tropical climate. I would ask some advice from people from the National Parks Board and especially Dr. Chin, the director of the Botanic Garden, who is an authority on the subject," she adds.

Dimitri finds inspiration mainly from archeology, history of arts (any culture), architecture and design.

Maro's inspiration is, "Almost everything that I see around me. Landscapes, colors, lights, shadows, materials. Art, of course, as a reference."

Commenting on Singapore's gardens, Dimitri says, "In my first visit in Singapore I was impressed by the omnipresence of vegetation, in and around the city. The Botanical Garden has an interesting species' collection. The omnipresence of vegetation gives a peaceful turn to the city."

As for Maro, she says, "I didn't have the occasion yet to visit many gardens in Singapore. I only visited the Botanical Garden, which is really amazing. Luxuriant, well designed with rare species of plants, a real pleasure to walk around. On my next trip to Singapore, I hope I'll have the opportunity to see other gardens, and would truly appreciate to visit a private one."

Dimitri has two gardens which he considers his favourites. He tells us why.

vegetation are placed statues of monsters and mythological creatures. The second is the park of "La Villette" in Paris. This park combines vegetation, contemporary architecture, lightings and overall it managed to be a very popular place."

Maro, whose light installations include the theatre, tells us how similar it really is when working in a theatre or a garden.

"Differences there are a lot. I would rather talk about their similarities. A garden is like scenery, illuminated by natural light. This light changes with the hours of the day and the aspect of the garden changes also. In the early morning the light is blue, in midday it is sharp and white, and in the late afternoon it gets soft and orange, then blue again until night falls. And of course you can intensify those changes, by planting trees, for example, that create shadows, or colorful plants that will reflect their color. Or even by using colored materials like gravel, pots, etc," she says.

She tells us of her favourite works.

"In theatre one of my favorites is a Shakespeare's "Othello" I "lit" some years ago. I managed to make it look like classical paintings, some scenes like Botticelli, others like Vermeer or El Greco. I was very proud to manage this.

My favorite garden is the one we designed with Dimitri for the International Garden Festival of Chaumont. An aquatic garden with pieces of a puzzle (Botticelli's Birth of Venus) floating on the water. It was a garden full of color, very cheerful and very calm at the same time.

As for my favorite light installation, it's the one we did together with Dimitri again, last November in Geneva, Switzerland. We transformed a small "grey" island to a bright "faerie", changing the perception of the space one has on his every day's way," she says.

For people who are interested in pursuing a career in garden design, Dimitri has this advice to offer:

"I would suggest visiting a lot of parks and gardens, private as well as public or historical ones. I would also suggest visiting museums of art and design, to travel abroad. To open eyes and mind as much as possible, do not copy but to create something new and original by combining different styles, different arts, and different techniques. Also, because you will work with a "living material", you will have to acquire a minimal knowledge of botany."

Maro says that those interested in a similar career should "...open their eyes to their environment, to travel, to visit museums and parks and lastly to inform themselves on art history."

25 July - 1 August
Suntec Convention Centre
10am - 10pm

For tickets and other information, please visit:



Chaumont, early-morning



Chaumont, late-afternoon